Public Health England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

International Health Regulation Strengthening (IHR) project

Comprehensive Futures and Foresight process: summary report

Aim

To use a comprehensive Futures and Foresight approach to explore what's driving change in the Global Health Security landscape and specifically identify future opportunities and threats for the PHE International Health Regulations (IHR) strengthening programme over the next 3 years and beyond.

Purpose of this paper

This report summarises all stages of this process, including details about the initial exercises that were undertaken to explore suitability of this methodology in a global health programme context. It sets out the opportunities, threats and recommendations that may help ensure the PHE IHR strengthening programme succeeds in its objectives in the next 3 years.

Context

IHR strengthening programme

The IHR strengthening project is an ODA-funded PHE project which aims to strengthen international efforts in specified countries and regions to improve global health security, through increased compliance with the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005. The IHR strengthening programme is currently in implementation phase, having obtained approval from Minister for Public Health in July 2017 and HM Treasury in September 2017. The core team is in place and the first phase of technical delivery in several focal countries is underway.

Futures and Foresight

Futures and Foresight is both an approach to identify the long-term opportunities and challenges shaping the development of a policy/ programme area and a way of exploring the implications these opportunities or challenges might have. It involves using a set of research and modelling tools to support the development of policy, programmes or projects that are resilient to a range of possible outcomes. The aim is not to predict or foretell the future but to assist decision makers to look ahead, envision, strategize, respond, shape and navigate the future[1]. It does this by helping identify the underlying drivers of change and exploring the uncertainty related to how these will change and evolve. It is anticipated that this should help enhance the capacity for smart, prudent, and anticipatory governance.

The PHE International Heath Regulations (IHR) strengthening team and key stakeholders have completed a formative process to scan the immediate operational horizon to understand the risks and uncertainties of achieving the project's intended objectives now and in the future. The following table outlines the 3 key stages and tools used, the approach and outputs.

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[1] Futures toolkit for policy-makers and analysts https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/futures-toolkit-for-policy-makers-and-analysts

Stage	Tool	Approach	Output
Gathering intelligence about the future	7 question interviews	Structured interviews conducted to gather intelligence about the future from 6 stakeholders who were out of the country or unable to attend the workshop.	9 key themes about future opportunities and threats were identified. These covered strategic planning for the longer term, funding, cross PHE and cross HMG working, the political landscape and a need to demonstrate impact. Insights were used to inform discussions in the workshop.
	Horizon scanning	Stakeholders were asked to assess and report early warning signs of future change on 3 occasions.	14 complete scans were submitted. These identified a range of early warning signs of change including specific "issues" in priority IHR strengthening countries, domestic politics and decision making around funding, shifting trends in global policy, leadership and alliances and difficulty measuring impact.
Exploring the dynamics of change	Driver mapping	At the workshop 2 horizon scans were chosen and explored in depth. As well as discussing known information about the specific issue, possible drivers and the potential consequences were examined. Additionally, all remaining horizon scans were reviewed after the workshop (by the process leads) and the various drivers categorised.	Drivers identified in the workshop discussion were clustered into themes and 2 key areas of priority were identified. There was found to be convergence between themes identified in workshop discussion and the remaining horizon scans.
Describing what the future might be like and develop responses	SWOT analysis	Using the 2 key areas identified, "measuring the impact of the programme" and "developing UK strategic vision for GHS", workshop attendees mapped the issues that will have an impact on successful delivery of the programme and the potential responses that could be employed to prevent negative consequences.	Analysis was appraised to determine the programme priorities, barriers to success and emerging opportunities.

What did we find out?

Stakeholders believe allocating sufficient time and capacity to foster partnerships and engage with other key stakeholders (both across government and globally) is essential for the success of the project.

There was recognition of current and ongoing global policy and leadership changes, and occasional uncertainty around roles and responsibilities of different government departments in relation global health strategy development and direction.

Opportunities to promote the project at high-level forums were identified. There was recognition that cross-department partnerships that are being developed for other global health programmes could be leveraged to improve cross-government working.

Demonstrating technical ability (through the development and testing of preparedness indicators) as well as developing work on the next global health strategy were both regarded as methods that could help promote and sustain the work currently underway on the project.

What could we do next?

The IHR strengthening project core team could:

- Share learning about specific risks and their drivers identified from this process with both PHE and cross UK government department colleagues.

- Take prudent decisions about expansion of the project. The process highlighted vulnerabilities, related to back fill of technical support as well as the need to prioritise resource to engage and form partnerships.

- Consider systematic and routine use of horizon scanning (and potentially futures and foresight planning) to facilitate ongoing risk assessment and project management.

- Continue to allocate sufficient time to engage with key stakeholders.

- Consider publishing an opinion piece to raise visibility of the project in the global health arena.

- Continue to explore longer term funding plan.

The global health division, specifically the senior management team, could:

- Consider whether specific risks and their drivers identified from this futures and foresight planning process should be taken more seriously and result in the formation of specific risk mitigation plans (at the global health division level).

- Advocate for the inclusion of a PH/ PHE representative in FCO-DFID discussions about political direction and strategic developments. This may ensure prudent decision making as well as provide an opportunity to raise the profile of PH programmes.

- Clarify PHE global programme team's role and ability, both internally and externally, to make decisions in response to particular risks and their drivers.

- Consider promoting and adopting futures planning approaches across the division and beyond (e.g. as part of global health strategy development). This would require developing ongoing partnerships with the futures team at Go Science to support training and implementation.

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